"Barbara Hofland as a Romantic-Era Provincial Poet"

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These 20th birthday issues this year are dedicated to everyone who has been involved with Women’s Writing for the last twenty years. This includes authors, reviewers, readers, editors, members of the editorial board, our first publisher Roger Osborn-King and all those at Triangle Press, the team at Taylor & Francis including our publishers, production managers, publicity and marketing teams, web and IT staff, proof-readers, designers, printers, van drivers. Thank you to you all.

**Stephen C. Behrendt**

**BARBARA HOFLAND AND ROMANTIC-ERA PROVINCIAL POETRY BY WOMEN**

Best remembered as a prolific author of prose for younger readers, the Sheffield author Barbara Hofland (1770–1844) also wrote and published poetry for adults throughout her career, work that illustrates the distinctive circumstances and challenges of the “provincial” writer attempting to negotiate in print both a conventional “literary” output and a complex fabric of local and occasional referentiality. Encouraged in Sheffield by James Montgomery, Hofland explored events, personages and poetic genres in ways that illuminate how Romantic-era provincial poets sought to generate and engage paying readerships by appealing in part to those readers’ fondness for the familiar, the recognizable and the local.

**Hofland the writer**

Barbara Hofland (1770–1844) began as a provincial writer, but achieved national and even international prominence over the course of a writing career that spanned approximately 50 years and yielded nearly 100 volumes. Best remembered today as a prolific author of writing for children, Hofland produced a body of work considerably more diverse than what the dismissive term “children’s books” leads one to expect. Indeed, her life and work have seldom been examined outside the parameters of that category, where she is typically grouped with evangelical writers from Hannah More to Sarah Trimmer. Even during her lifetime, comments like this from Ackermann’s *La Belle Assemblée* in 1823 were typical:

The writings of Mrs. H. are altogether feminine: they exhibit great power of imagination, deep feeling, and a lively sensibility to the beautiful in nature and art. […] The religion which she makes the ground work of all [her writing], and which she has the art of making her readers teach themselves, is religion in its best form; unobtrusive and yet unfailing; gentle yet active; modest yet firm; moderate, kind, and consistent, without sourness, bigotry, or enthusiasm.¹

This might be written of any number of evangelical women writers of the period, though, and while it typifies contemporary views of Hofland’s prose.
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¹Women’s Writing, 2013
generally, and of her fiction for younger readers in particular, it is misleading both in its excessive sanctimony and in its disregard both of her prose for adults and of the poetry she wrote and published. Despite its overall conventionality, that poetry nevertheless exhibits more than just mere competence. Yet even Dennis Butts, Holland’s most extensive commentator, casts only a passing glance at this aspect of her work. In revisiting Holland’s poetry in this essay, I shall briefly revisit also the broader subject of the woman poet who lives and works at a considerable distance from the publishing centers of Britain (London and Edinburgh), and I shall consider what this rustication may tell us about their circumstances. This essay is concerned almost exclusively with Holland’s poetry, most of which is demonstrably “provincial” both in its treatment of its subject matter and because she composed and published it (principally under the name of Hoole) before her removal to London in 1811 following her marriage to Thomas Christopher Holland.

Barbara Wrecks was born in Sheffield in 1770, the year of William Wordsworth’s birth and 11 years after Charlotte Smith’s. Her father, Robert, a principal partner in an iron-manufacturing firm, died when she was three, leaving the young Barbara and a younger brother to the care of his widow, who soon remarried and arranged for Barbara to be raised by an apparently doting maiden aunt, who seems to have seen to it that she acquired an education that included a full range of British poets. She evidently began composing poetry relatively early on, for by 1794 her “decorous Augustan verse” had begun to appear anonymously or pseudonymously in the Sheffield press, some of it in the Iris or Sheffield Advertiser and some of it in the Sheffield Courant, as well as in the Hall Advertiser and Exchange Gazette.

Barbara Wrecks ran a milliner’s shop in Church Lane until some time in 1795, when she left Sheffield for Bath, a brief but apparently happy residence she commemorated in her Poems in a “Sonnet to Bath.” She soon returned to Sheffield, where in 1796 she married Thomas Bradshaw Hoole, “a young man of great worth and promise, connected with an important mercantile house in Sheffield.” In a catastrophe that would recur in the tales about young widows she began publishing in 1809, her husband died unexpectedly of a rapid consumption in March 1799, and his business collapsed soon afterward, leaving her virtually penniless and with a young son to support. She seems to have moved—perhaps for economic reasons—to the relatively genteel mercantile community of Attercliffe, located to the near north-east of Sheffield, where she lived for a time with her mother-in-law.

From that new residence, in 1805, Hoole published her Poems, with the assistance of her friend, the poet James Montgomery, who was at that time the editor of the Sheffield Iris, and who helped secure subscriptions for the book and advertised its publication repeatedly in the Iris. Already well known in the Sheffield community before her marriage, she had inevitably gained additional social status as the wife of a prominent businessman. Her difficult situation as a widow garnered widespread public sympathy when it became generally known that she had been largely impoverished in the wake of her husband’s untimely death. Publishing her Poems, then, was in fact a decidedly practical step undertaken to remedy real and pressing financial needs. The extent of her circle of acquaintances and affection is dramatically illustrated by the fact that the list of subscribers to the Poems occupies more than 40 pages and accounts for nearly 2000 copies. Indeed, the obituary published in the Gentleman’s Magazine shortly after her death attributes this extraordinary fact to the widow’s uncommon reputation:

Beloved and admired for her exemplary and amiable demeanour, and universally sympathised with for her great and interesting troubles, she drew to her assistance the hearts and hands of the good people of Sheffield, who showed that they had a dispossession to “visit the widow and the fatherless in their affliction”.

Many years later, the barrister Samuel Carter Hall (founding editor of the popular early annual the Amulet, to which Holland subsequently contributed) recalled her as “[d]ear, good, sympathizing, unselfish Barbara Hoole!” and he quoted his wife’s opinion that among her “sisters in literature” she could think of “none more free from affectation—more gentle or genial, more faithful as mother, wife, and friend”. This point is worth remarking, for the lives and works of provincial poets like Hoole typically reflect a clear sense of community that is a function of the smaller geographical and social circle in which they lived, wrote and published. This sense of a local, “known” community overtly informs their subject matter in several ways, as we shall see.

The proceeds from her Poems seem to have enabled Hoole to move to the spa town of Harrogate, some 68 kilometers north of Sheffield. There she enrolled her son Frederick in a Moravian school at nearby Fullneck, just west of Leeds, perhaps through the agency of the reliable Montgomery, who was himself the son of a Moravian pastor and missionary. Meanwhile, she also opened a girls’ boarding school in Harrogate. In 1808, at the age of 38, she married the aspiring landscape painter Thomas Christopher Holland, some seven years her junior, who had exhibited at the Royal Academy beginning in 1799 and who had relocated to a teaching position in Derby for three years (1805–08) and again in 1808 to Doncaster and finally to Knaresborough, 5 kilometers east of Harrogate. There he and Barbara Hoole were married, against the wishes (and justified fears) of her friends and family alike, on 28 January 1810. In 1811, the Hollandes moved to London, where Thomas worked as a commissioned art copyist and as a landscape painter, in which latter
capacity he won the British Institution’s first prize for landscape (100 guineas) in 1814 for A Storm off Scarborough, which the Marquis of Stafford purchased and which seemed for the moment to have established his popular reputation.

An abortive joint commission for husband and wife to prepare an illustrated description (with text by Barbara and pictures by Thomas) of the mansion of Whiteknights, near Reading, occupied them for nearly three years and turned out disastrously when the Marquis of Blandford, George Spencer-Churchill (soon to be fifth Duke of Marlborough, whom the irrepressible Mary Russell Mitford called “that notable fool, His Grace of Marlborough”15), defaulted on the commission. With the duke nearly bankrupt by 1819, when the Hoflands completed their project, it fell to the Hoflands to pay out of their own pockets for the printing and engraving of the handsome privately published work, which concluded with a descriptive poem by Barbara lauding Whiteknights’ beauty.11 Understandably pressed for funds now, husband and wife painted and wrote with some urgency, and the prolific Barbara, at least, enjoyed commercial success. She had already hit her stride, beginning in 1809, with what proved to be a long series of books for young people composed in the evangelical tradition of “moral tales teaching piety and fortitude”, especially in the face of adversity.12 Hofland became a staple author both for John Harris, who had succeeded John Newbery and his family as the pre-eminent London publisher of children’s books, and for A.K. Newman, who had succeeded William Lane as director of the Minerva Press. Her association with the sprawling enterprises of Harris and Newman helps to account for both the remarkable number of works (and published copies of them) that she sold (estimated at nearly 300,000 in Britain alone by 184513) and the widespread readership she achieved. Indeed, by 1853, an edition of the classic Sandford and Merton published in London by Arthur Hall, Virtue and Co. contained at the back a two-page advertisement for “The Hofland Library: for The Instruction and Amusement of Youth”.14

Hofland’s marriage was anything but sunny, however; Butts, for instance, calls Thomas a “difficult” husband, who preferred the life of “a leisured gentleman”, and he hints that Thomas may well have been abusive, as some of Barbara’s friends apparently suspected and as was subsequently reported in later accounts of her life (Butts 4). Samuel Carter Hall’s wife (who conducted the children’s annual the Juvenile Forget-Me-Not, to which Hofland also contributed) noted pointedly in 1854 that:

It is ill to write unkindly of the dead; and he whose harshness caused her virtues to shine so brightly, honoured her in his heart; though a long series of years of suffering from internal disease rendered him, despite his talent and his knowledge, so great a penance to so rare a wife.15

Although Thomas exhibited with the British Institution and the Royal Academy, and was a co-founder in 1823 of the Society of British Artists, his career remained erratic; while he subsequently secured the patronage of Lord Egremont, that patronage came only late in his life (1840), which was shortened by the cancer to which he succumbed at Leamington Spa in 1843.

The poetry of Barbara Wrecks first appeared in one of her hometown newspapers, the Sheffield Iris, in whose pages she appears to have published a dozen or more poems. This weekly, which appeared on Tuesdays, had been relaunched by James Montgomery in 1794 after he had purchased it from its previous proprietor, the radical Unitarian publisher Joseph Gales, who had run the paper under the title of the Sheffield Register. Gales had been harassed for his radical politics, including his unusual practice (for a provincial paper) of publishing tracts by the likes of Thomas Paine and Joseph Priestley. Feeling particularly pressed in the wake of the notorious Treason Trials of 1794, Gales had opted to flee to Germany (and subsequently to the USA, where he settled in Philadelphia) upon selling the paper to Montgomery. Montgomery had no comparable interest in radical politics, although his broadly humanitarian outlook is evident everywhere in his writing, both for the Iris and elsewhere. At the time when the Iris came under Montgomery’s editorship, however, it enjoyed a circulation of some 2000 copies, and the government’s ongoing distrust of the paper is indicated by Montgomery’s prosecution (and imprisonment for three months) in 1795 for sedition, for publishing a poem that had appeared on a handbill celebrating the fall of the Bastille.16 Notably, Hoole responded in the public forum of the Iris with a sonnet praising Montgomery’s defense attorney, Felix Vaughan. From this act stemmed the long friendship (and correspondence) that ensued between the two. Montgomery’s brushes with the law led him to adopt a more non-confrontational approach to his editorship, although that move cost him subscribers among Gales’ radical supporters—perhaps as many as 1000 in the first year.17

While Montgomery took the Iris in a far less controversial direction, he proved influential in the careers and reputations of many writers, poets in particular. Indeed, as C.R. Johnson observes in his bibliographical survey of British provincial poetry, the record of provincial poets “abounds […] with references and tributes to James Montgomery, the Sheffield poet and printer”.18 Significantly, the initial number of the Iris included a celebratory apostrophe “from the pen of a friend, Barbara Hoole” that concluded with these lines addressed to the paper:

Far may thy glowing beauties shine,
And glad success secure thy beam,
While Reason mild, and Peace divine,
Roll o’er the earth their lucid stream.
Later, it was Montgomery who arranged for the publication of Barbara Hoole’s 1805 Poems at the Iris office, as the volume’s title page indicates. In one of two long, light-hearted poems about Harrogate that she later published in 1812 under the pseudonym of “Benjamin Blunderhead”, she adds to the list of poets with whom her Blunderhead claims to have “dazzled the minds of the crowd” at Harrogate “the matchless Montgomery”. In her local history of Sheffield, Mary Walton remarks that: “The general mediocrity of Sheffield literary effort [during this period] is not so surprising as the fact that it existed”. As she notes, the unprecedented flourishing of “culture” in Sheffield reflected the optimism among artists and writers, on the one hand, and philanthropic businessmen, on the other, over their combined efforts to raise the cultural consciousness of the Sheffield citizenry while providing venues for local talent.

The literary circle that included Montgomery and Hoole/Hofland in the period before her move to London was, then, both a local one (Sheffield proper) and a regional one (Derbyshire and Yorkshire), and it is clear that she initially envisioned an immediately provincial readership as a primary audience, even as she aspired to a national one. Among the poems she published in the Sheffield Courant, for example, is a series of “Characteristics of some leading inhabitants of Sheffield at the close of the eighteenth century”. These poetic vignettes depict prominent citizens, such as the draper and surgeon Dr Staniforth, the young Dr Benjamin Wainwright and the family of James Wheat who resided on Paradise Square. In addition to these two Sheffield papers, the poet also published 19 poems in the Hull Advertiser and Exchange Gazette between 26 July 1794 and 24 March 1798, signing some as “Nemorina” and others as “Penseroso”. Hull lies some 80 kilometers to the east-north-east of Sheffield, which suggests both the geographical extent of the poet’s “contacts” during this early stage of her career and the network of provincial printers and booksellers with whom authors might work for their mutual benefit. Those contacts also include other published poets, via various print media. When the Hull Advertiser, on 21 February 1795, reprinted Thomas Holcroft’s poem “Gaffer Gray” (published in the Gentleman’s Magazine for July 1794), for example, it printed immediately beneath that poem “Verses written while reading the above”, a brief poem signed “Penseroso”. Presumably, either the latter poem’s author had been supplied with a copy of Holcroft’s poem and invited to respond or (more likely) the author had submitted both pieces to the Advertiser. Four months earlier, something similar had occurred, when the Advertiser followed a sonnet reprinted from the London St. James Chronicle with another “in Answer to the above” and bearing as signature the initials “B.W.”, which are right for the as-yet-unmarried Barbara Wrecks. Further evidence of networking appears in a slightly different fashion later with Hofland’s Harrogate poems, whose title pages name printers and primary booksellers in Harrogate and Knaresborough, along with York and London. Indeed, the first of these poems (A Season at Harrogate, 1812) also names booksellers in Leeds, Doncaster, Ripon, Halifax, Liverpool and Sheffield, while the second (A Week at Harrogate, 1812) gathers these latter towns under the umbrella of “Other Booksellers in York, Leeds, Ripon, &c.”. Most of these communities are mentioned in the 1805 Poems as well as in the later Harrogate poems.

The Hull poems point to another dimension of their author’s “circle”, for in 1800 appeared Poems on Several Occasions by the recently deceased Reverend Thomas Browne (1771–98) of Kingston upon Hull. Browne, a Yorkshireman, had served as a rural schoolteacher in Yorkshire before moving in 1797 to Hull, where he took holy orders (and married) and where he also served as editor of the Advertiser until his untimely death. Browne’s posthumous volume may well have been edited by James Montgomery; the “Editor’s Preface”, which contains a brief but insightful assessment of contemporary poetry, is signed “J.M.”. Moreover, the “Editor’s Preface” explicitly singles out for praise “[t]he beautiful Ode signed ‘Nemorina’ [which] is of itself sufficient to confer value on any publication in which it appears.”

This poem, “Ode, on the Death of Alexis”, appears also in Hoole’s 1805 collection, slightly revised, as “Ode on the Death of the Rev. Thomas Browne, Late of Hull”. It begins with the line “Wrapt in her dark and wint’ry shroud, / The moon scarce pierced the murky cloud”, a beginning that significantly echoes the opening lines of a poem from the Hull Advertiser called “To Alexis”; “Wrapt in the gloom of care’s Circean cell, / My timid muse no more attuned the lyre”. When Browne published poems of his own in the Advertiser, he usually signed himself as “Alexis” or simply “A.”. And Browne’s posthumous collection contains a poem he called “Lines, Addressed to a young Lady, who wrote many beautiful Poetical Pieces, which appeared in the Hull Advertiser, signed Nemorina”, Hoole’s frequent pseudonym. Interestingly, among the poems in the “Poetical Tributes to the Memory of the Author” at the end of Browne’s Poems is a “Sonnet, on the Death of Alexis; addressed to one of his Friends” and a “Sonnet, inscribed to the memory of the late Rev. Thomas Browne”. Both poems are in three separated quatrains and a separated couplet, the arrangement that Hoole used for some of the sonnets in her 1805 Poems. But neither sonnet appears in that volume, suggesting that neither was composed by Hoole. Moreover, although the second sonnet is signed “Nemorina”, it is also inscribed from Hotwells, Bristol, while the only two of Hoole’s poems in the Advertiser that bear place designations are marked as coming from Sheffield. In the Hull Advertiser for 24 March 1798, the “Nemorina” sonnet appears immediately following a 20-line poem called “On the Death of Alexis” that is signed “A.Y.” and it is also included among the tributary poems in Browne’s posthumous volume. All of this hints at the existence of a network—both social and poetic—in which Hoole, Browne,
Montgomery and others participated. Indeed, the links among Hoole, Browne and the Advertiser circle are further evident from the fact that, among the list of subscribers to Browne’s Poems, we find “Mrs. B. Hoole, Sheffield, two copies”, as well as the names of Joseph and John Wrecks of Sheffield.\(^{32}\)

How close were Hoole and Montgomery? The editors of Montgomery’s Memoirs, John Holland (who succeeded Montgomery as editor of the Iris) and his associate James Everett, stated that:

The book was not only printed at Montgomery’s press, but every article in it had the benefit of his revision; and many a pleasant interview took place between the good-natured poet and the ingenious young widow, during the composition of most of her verses in the two preceding years. On one occasion he gave her a pocket-book, as a New Year’s gift.\(^{31}\)

The book, signed “J.M.” and dated December 1803, is inscribed with a poem that promises better times in the coming year.

The 1805 Poems, the only collection that Hoole/Hofland published, is a substantial volume; its 256 pages contain 95 poems, most of them short. Among the poems are conventional sonnets on abstract subjects (for example, “To Melancholy”, “To Wealth” and “To Disappointment”) and places (for example, “Sonnet to Bath” and “Sonnet, Composed on the Banks of Ullswater”); formal elegiac odes (for example, “Ode on the Death of the Rev. Thomas Browne, Late of Hull” and “Ode, on the Death of Dr. Darwin”); less formal elegies (for example, “Lines on the Death of Mr. Taylor, of Whitworth” and “Lines, Occasioned by the Death of a little Relative”); narrative tales (for example, “An Old Man’s Tale” and “William and Ellen”); occasional pieces (for example, “Lines Addressed to a Friend on His Marriage” and “Inscription for the Sud Seat in G.D.’s Garden”) and assorted poems called “lines” or “stanzas” on various subjects. Several poems also address wartime issues, including the poignant optimistic “Ode on the Peace of 1802”, the “Verses on the Threatened Invasion, written in July, 1803” with which the collection opens, and the interesting “Stanzas, occasioned by the Death of Mr. S. Radford, Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers, by the Yellow Fever, in the West Indies, in 1802”. The incident commemorated in this poem figures also in the “Letter to Miss Mee (Dec. 1800)”, which laments the death of Miss Mee’s friend, “Captain Bartlett, the commanding Royal Engineer”, who died, along with this same Lieutenant Radford and several of his comrades, from yellow fever within a few months of their arrival in the West Indies.\(^{34}\)

Given that fewer than half the poems from the Hull Advertiser appear again in Poems, as is likewise true of the poems from the Courant and the Iris in Sheffield, Hoole appears to have been a prolific poet, if not an especially accomplished one. Moreover, she took pains to revise those previously published poems, with or without the assistance of Montgomery mentioned above. For example, “Stanzas inscribed to a Winter Stock” was called “Stanzas Inscribed to a Wall Flower” when it appeared in the Advertiser. The extent of Hoole’s alterations may be calculated from a comparison of the poems’ second stanzas:

Thus have I seen fair Virtue’s suffering child,
    When fell distaste usurp’d a ranc’rous pow’r,
    Bow to the keen breeze still with sorrows mild,
    And bend submissive to the chast’ning hour. (Hull Advertiser, 30 Jan. 1796, p. 4.)

Thus have I seen fair Virtue’s suffering child,
    When fell disease display’d his rancorous power,
    Bow to the blast with resignation mild,
    And smile submission in the chastening hour. (Poems 87)

From evidence like this, we may reasonably conclude that Hoole took her craft seriously and that writing was, for her, whatever the genre or the circumstances of her work, an occupation in which she took both a personal and professional pride.

The “local habitation” of provincial poetry

Hoole’s poems exhibit a sense of “local identity” that is particularly characteristic of provincial poetry—that is, they name names in very specific ways (like the poems involving Lieutenant Radford), so that readers may easily recognize in the poem’s lines persons, places and events from their own frame of experience. Readers are always gratified by a sense of familiarity in what they read, and Hoole undoubtedly counted on generating among her readers a sense of community. Those readers may well have subscribed to her collection as much out of humanitarian sympathy as out of any expectation of literary quality (and perhaps more so), but those who took the trouble to read the poems would surely have been pleased to find there an abundance of local referents and indeed, perhaps, to discover themselves there too, thinly veiled or not. “Stanzas to the River Dun”, for instance, enumerates geographical and historical features that line “Sheff’s industrious shore”, and references the village of Doncaster in a footnote.\(^{35}\) The titles of other poems identify places like Roche Abbey, Hillborough and Keye Hill, while some are even more locationally specific, like the “Sonnet, Composed in a Cell (commonly called the Giant’s Cave) on the Banks of the Eimont”.\(^{36}\) Other poems, like the elegies for the Reverend Browne, Erasmus Darwin and Mr T. Burton, assume
community recognition, while the impulses to particularize both person and place converge in “A Friendly Epistle, written from Bannercross, while attending the sick bed of a sister”. Considering that Holland and Everett observe in their Memoir that Montgomery was intimately involved in the revision of many of the poems in Hoole’s collection, it is tempting to speculate that he may have recommended just this sort of particularization. At the same time, topical specificity is a hallmark of the verse (including Hoole’s) that appeared in the daily or periodical press, including Montgomery’s Iris.

Montgomery was, in fact, continually active in literary circles in the Sheffield region, even once he had begun to publish his own poetry on a broader and more national scale. He continued to publish and to advocate provincial authors, as, for instance, when he returned to the now remarried Barbara Hofland in 1809, while she still resided at Knaresborough, near Harrogate, for La Fête de la Rose; or, The Dramatic Flowers. This brief production was one of the many imitations produced during these years of William Roscoe’s cheerful little children’s book in verse, The Butterfly’s Ball (1807), and its first imitator, The Peacock “at Home” (1807), by Charlotte Smith’s sister Catherine Turner Dorset. A historian, republican and abolitionist, Roscoe was from Liverpool, and he and Montgomery had become acquainted perhaps as early as late 1804. After 1808, they frequently exchanged books and letters, and Roscoe sent Montgomery a copy of The Butterfly’s Ball in March 1809. Considering that she was by this time conducting her boarding school at Harrogate (and having trouble getting her clients to pay for their troublesome students), Montgomery may have suggested that writing for children might prove lucrative for her, perhaps even suggesting Roscoe’s poem as a model for emulation. However she became acquainted with The Butterfly’s Ball, Hofland was uncommonly savvy about the popular literary market and knew how to write in popular formats, as Dennis Butts has observed. When she sent Montgomery her completed manuscript, she was very specific about its printed format, telling him that: “The more it can be made to look like the Butterfly’s Ball Lions Fete &c. &c. the more likely it must be to sell”.

Montgomery remained a friend to Hofland and her husband, maintaining contact when he visited Harrogate in the summers. When, in 1810, she asked him to recommend Thomas for an appointment as associate to the Liverpool Academy of Arts, he wrote immediately to William Roscoe, pointing out their long friendship: “With Mrs. Hofland (formerly Mrs. B. Hoole) I have been long and intimately acquainted. She is a woman of singular genius, and I have known her through […] many sorrows and sufferings”. Thomas was appointed at once.

It is very likely that Montgomery was also involved in the publication in 1812 of two long narrative poems, A Season at Harrogate and A Week at Harrogate. Both pose as sets of verse epistles by Benjamin Blunderhead, Esq., the first addressed to his mother and the second to a friend. According to the prefatory “Advertisement” in A Season, Hofland’s “watering place bagatelles”, as she calls them, are modeled on The New Bath Guide by Christopher Anstey (1724–1805), which had been published in 1766 in London, Bath, Oxford, Cambridge and Dublin, but also (according to its title page) in Bristol, York and Edinburgh. The “poetic epistles” in Anstey’s satirical poem are likewise attributed to the “Blunderhead” family. Cast in the form of rhymed couplets, A Season and A Week each record, from Benjamin’s point of view, the goings-on of a fashionable leisure-class crowd that assembles in Harrogate for the ostensible purpose of taking the restorative (but smelly) waters, principally of the Chalybeate Well at High Harrogate and the Sulphur Well at Lower Harrogate, with occasional sightseeing sallies into the countryside. The verse is itself middling at best, as is typical for most works in this vein. The chief interest, especially for readers from the area who would have made up the principal audience, lies in the mention of persons and places in Harrogate and its environs. Like the “Characteristics” of Sheffield luminaries she had published a decade and a half earlier, these indulgences in name-dropping both flatter those who are identified and delight those who recognize their subjects.

Hofland was a crafty name-dropper, though. In A Season, for example, she has Benjamin write that “last week to read novels I took / And had stepped up to Wilson’s to get a new book”. “Wilson’s” constitutes a nod to (and a plug for) the bookseller R. Wilson, who operated shops in both Harrogate and Knaresborough, and who was the brother of G. Wilson, who printed A Season. She does something comparable in A Week, which, the title page of the second edition (1813) informs us, was “Printed for the Author” by Hargrove’s Office, and sold by Hargrove and Sons, Knaresborough and Harrogate, as well as by other regional booksellers and by Longman in London. In his account of his Monday activities, Benjamin reports that he took a walk in the “High town” (meaning High Harrogate, as opposed to Low), where

Assemble the baron, the countess, and lord;
Each morning, each noon, and each night, on the green
Into Hargrove’s we went—’tis a place, I declare,
To which, every morning, I mean to repair—
So many young ladies, gay sparks, and new books,
I wish you had seen how exalted my looks;
I paid my subscription—went into the room,
With that dignified air I am wont to assume,
I sat myself down—took a paper, and read
About folks that were married, and folks that were dead;
For, I think it amusing to read of such things,
Far more than of ministers, princes, or kings;
As the printers of papers can make the French strike,
Or run, like a water-hen, just as they like;
And, as I intended, the next day, to ride,
I bought, of the author, an *Harrogate Guide.*

Later, having paid his subscription on Monday, Benjamin finds himself back at Hargrove’s on Wednesday, where

[...] a lady or two
Came in, with “Pray give us something that’s new!”
A gentleman call’d out—“Yes! Do, my old friend,
To these ladies, some excellent book recommend!
“They don’t care a fig what the thing is about,
Only let it be something that’s lately come out!
There’s that book we’ve brought back, may remain on your shelf,
That comical tale of *Thinks I to myself?*
“But, reach *Self Control!*—I believe it may do
To keep us awake, for an hour or two!
The book I’ve brought back, is the whole I had got,
Give me something, that’s wrote by the fam’d Walter Scot! [sic]
“Or I wish you would favor me just with a look
At that new publication, entitled *The Book*.”

Here, Hofland wittily introduces Edward Nares’ *Think’s 1 to Myself* (published in London in 1811), Mary Brunton’s *Self-Control* (published in Edinburgh in 1811), an unnamed volume of Scott’s poetry (*Waverley* did not appear until 1814) and the anonymous *The Book!* Or, *Procrastinated Memoirs. An Historical Romance* (1812). Her point is both to underscore the “gentleman’s” point about the women’s indiscriminate reading and to tout the extent of Hargrove’s holdings.

Following her move to London and finally to Richmond, Hofland continued to write poetry but published only occasionally, usually in connection with her husband’s paintings. The *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* for 1821, for example, contains the “Sonnet. On a Landscape by Mr. Hofland”, which concludes with an encomiastic apostrophe to the picture:

Work of the poet’s eye, the painter’s hand,
How close to nature art thou, yet how free
From earthly stain! The beautiful, the bland,
The rose, the nightingale resemble thee;
Thou art most like the blissful fairy-land
Of Spenser, or Mozart’s fine melody.

Another poem on her husband’s work, a painting of Windsor by moonlight, appeared in the same journal in 1835. For the most part, though, the practical professional writer in Hofland appreciated that it was prose, not verse, which in the long run paid the bills. Hofland’s early biographer, Thomas Ramsey, reports that, as early as 1823, Hofland had told him that she was convinced that “nine readers out of ten skip the poetry” in the annuals, and that their editors “consider one prose article worth two of poetry, for the general reader.” Still, the letters she exchanged with her long-time correspondent Mary Russell Mitford indicate that she continued to write verse. Mitford writes on 21 February 1819, for instance, that she has been delighted to receive Hofland’s “lovely verses” (perhaps a draft of the descriptive poem for the Whitknights project?), depicting “so sweet a landscape, so sweetly painted”.

“I have long known what a prosér you are”, Mitford continues, “but I did not before know you to be such a poetess”. She did, in fact, compose other poems in the vein of verse that appeared in the annuals in the 1820s and 1830s, three of which Ramsey published (for the first time, he claimed) in his memoir of Hofland.

Finally, Ramsey printed near the conclusion of his biographical memoir of Hofland two sonnets, “both written in one day” (12 April 1844), which he identifies as “the production of a person at the age of seventy-four years”. The first of these sonnets looks for the positive in “a day of disappointment”, in which one must inevitably bid

Farewell, then, to our hopes; but not farewell
To the far better hopes, that days more bright
Shall bid those young and generous bosoms swell,
Thro’ many a coming year with pure delight.

But the second sonnet, “inscribed to Miss Elizabeth Bushnell”, presents a more sober view of the delights of “spring days and albums” that are available to the young but no longer to the poet:

[...] wise it is, dear girl, you should engage
Such joys to taste, such duty to fulfill;
But all unmeet for such sweet task am I,
The flowers of spring bloom not ‘neath winter’s sky.

Hofland died on 9 November 1844 in Richmond, where she is buried in the parish churchyard of St. Mary Magdalen.

**Hofland and provincial women poets**

The provincial women poets of the Romantic era seem to fall into several largely discrete categories. First are what might be called “charity cases”. These are poets of severely diminished circumstances who have been taken up by well-meaning benefactors who arrange for publication of a selection of their poems as a way of providing the poets with some economic security—limited
though it often was—without subjecting them to the humiliation that abject poverty would otherwise impose. Ann Candler, the “Suffolk Cottager”, is one such poet. Her Poetical Attempts (1803) was published by subscription in Ipswich for sale there and through the London bookseller T. Hurst (who would become one of Longman’s partners) of Paternoster Row. The unidentified benevolent editor includes at the head of the collection Candler’s own account of her hard life as the abandoned wife of a profligate soldier and a long-suffering mother who has endured the rigors of poverty, including a term in the Tattingstone House of Industry. The editor adds the following:

At the time of writing [her autobiographical account], Mrs. Candler had not a hope of being enabled to remove out of the house of industry; but, about eight or nine months after, several of her Poems having been read and approved, in polite and literary circles, it was suggested, by the ladies to whom her letter was addressed, that, if she could publish a small volume by subscription, she might raise a sum sufficient to furnish a room, and place herself, in a state of comparative happiness, near her married daughter, where she might spend the evening of her days in peace, supported by her own industry, and occasionally assisted by those friends who know, and respect, her unobtrusive good qualities.54

A similar humanitarian impulse informs the prefatory editorial comments to other collections in this vein, like those supplied by the unidentified editor of the Poems (1792) of Ellen Taylor, “the Irish Cottager”, or Catharine Cappe’s remarks in Charlotte Richardson’s Poems written on Different Occasions (1806).55 Like Candler, who came from the Ipswich area, Richardson (née Charlotte Smith) was also a provincial, her volume having been published in York; although Taylor’s poems were published in Dublin, both the nature of that city in 1792 and Taylor’s actual residence at “the Commons of Lyons” qualify her for the “provincial” category.

Inhabiting a social stratum just above (sometimes only barely above) poets like Candler, Taylor and Richardson are provincial laboring-class poets like Elizabeth Hands and the Scots-Irish spinner poet Sarah Leech, who both write about quotidian affairs, often humorously. Hands’ quirky but eminently readable 1789 volume was sponsored by the masters of Rugby School, who gathered more than 1000 subscriptions for its publication.56 Leech’s Poems, on Various Subjects is prefaced by a “Biographical Memoir” of this “peasant girl” and a full-blown preface, both by the unidentified editor who has intervened on the poet’s behalf. As this editor puts it:

A graduate of Trinity College, who has had many opportunities of knowing her Christian piety and exemplary moral character, and is an admirer, in common with some literary characters, of her poetic talent, kindly proposed to prepare a selection of her Poems for publication, in hopes of being able to raise by the sale, a small sum to assist her in her pilgrimage through life.57

The editor takes pains to inform the reader that Leech is also a “provincial”, noting that she resides, at an advanced age and suffering severely from rheumatism, in the village of Lettergull, about half a mile from her birthplace in Ballylennan.

Not surprisingly, the fourth and upper stratum (I have momentarily passed over the third) is occupied by minor (and occasionally major) aristocrats and by writers who are actually rising from the ranks of the emerging bourgeois or who are at least aspiring to do so. These are poets like the Irish transplants Lady Catherine Rebecca Manners and Marguerite (Power), Countess of Blessington, who could comfortably finance what they published, if they so desired, and for whatever personal or philanthropic reasons.58 While poets in this category may have had roots in the provinces, they had come to inhabit the cosmopolitan scenes of the great cities, particularly London, which is where their works were published. Nor did their works require rhetorical interventions like the pleading prefaces that were a staple of volumes of the truly provincial and the poverty-stricken poets alike.

Finally, there is another category that we might properly locate “beneath” this one—a class of poets who write “professionally”, in the modern sense, as a means of earning money to support themselves and their families. Charlotte Smith was one such poet; Mary Robinson was another; later, both Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon found themselves (for somewhat different reasons) in this category. Barbara Hofland properly belongs here, too, notwithstanding that she turned to the more lucrative genre of prose fiction at about the time she left the provinces—Sheffield and its environs—for the urban center—London—leaving at the same time the constellation of local referentiality that characterizes the verse she composed and published before (and immediately after) her removal. All these poets demonstrate, in their lives as in their works, a heightened sensitivity to the vicissitudes of addressing, depicting and appealing to distinctively “local” human subjects and subject matter. Moreover, more so than the work of poets more firmly based in the urban centers, their poetry exhibits an undoubtedly calculated interaction with associates, peers, friends and mentors, both in the community and in the publishing trade. Such calculation went with the territory, so to speak, and was essential to the poet (and especially the woman poet) who wished to be a largely self-supporting author.

The literary history of the Romantic era in the British Isles is full of examples of what today we might call “networking”, in which constellations of
authors coalesced around political principles, religious causes, shared publishers and geographical connections. The Coleridge–Wordsworth circle in the late 1790s and its successor, the Wordsworth circle after 1820, is one example. Others include the Shelley–Byron circle in Italy in the later Regency, the Keats–Haydon–Lamb nexus in London at about the same time, and the Scott–Ballantyne–Constable circle in Scotland. Among these, only the Keats circle seems to have involved few or no women; in all the others there arose a familiarity—both personal and professional—with women writers and, in many cases (Scott, for example), genuine attempts to assist women in publishing their work under favorable conditions. This is the sort of constellation of relations that we see in the case of Barbara Hofland, and that constellation was initially very much a regional one, as I have sought to document here. The provincial writer—and especially the provincial woman poet—needed to cultivate just such a constellation of connections in order fully to succeed, in terms of both financial gain and literary reputation. At times, it may in fact have been an advantage to be known for (and by) one’s provincial roots, especially on those occasions when one sought the patronage of a more “local” or “regional” audience.

Acknowledgements

I thank David Alexander Smith for his invaluable assistance in documenting Hofland’s publications in the Hall Advertiser.

Notes

3 Butts 2; Blain, Grundy, and Clements 530.
4 Barbara Hoole, Poems (Sheffield: printed by James Montgomery at the Iris Office, [1805]) 42.
5 See the obituary, “Mrs. Hofland,” Gentleman’s Magazine ns 23 (1845): 100.
6 Barbara Hoole had also given birth to a daughter, who died in 1798 at the age of 14 months. Thomas Ramsey explains that not only did the widow lose any legacy from her husband when his business collapsed, but she was further pressed when a legacy left to her infant son by her grandfather was also lost when the trustee to whom it had been consigned likewise became insolvent. See Thomas Ramsey, The Life and Literary Remains of Barbara Hofland (London, 1849) 12–13. I have discussed this aspect of her work in detail in “Women without Men: Barbara Hofland and the Economics of Widowhood,” Eighteenth-Century Fiction 17.3 (2005): 480–508. See also Anne Frey, “Barbara Hofland’s Profession: Questioning the Calling,” Wordsworth Circle 36.3 (2005): 110–12.
12 Frey 110.
16 Montgomery was imprisoned for a second time, for six months, in 1795, and fined £30 for describing in the Iris, in disapproving terms, a riot in Sheffield in which the local Volunteers killed two men and wounded several others.
A Season at Harrogate; in a Series of Poetical Epistles from Benjamin Blunderhead, Esquire, to his Mother, in Derbyshire (Knaresborough, 1812) 27. While Holland’s name does not appear on the title page, she signs herself prominently as “B. Holland” at the end of the preface that precedes the poem, dating the preface as 1 December 1811, from High Harrogate. The cataloguing of poets in A Season recalls Holland’s catalogues of poets also in her “Ode on the Death of the Rev. Thomas Browne, Late of Hull” and the “Friendly Epistle to a Young Gentleman, on His Entrance into Life”, both from her 1805 Poems. Mary Walton, Sheffield: Its Story and Its Achievements, 4th ed. (Sheffield: S.R., 1968) 162.

In addition to Montgomery (and Holland), other writers included the Sheffield poet Susanna Pearson (Poems, 1790), Ebenezer Elliott and Joseph Hunter, while the Derbyshire (and Sheffield) sculptor (Sir) Francis Chantrey had by 1810 begun to enjoy a national reputation.


Gentleman’s Magazine 76 (July 1794): 653.

The sonnet from the St. James Chronicle bears the signatory initials “M.E.R.”, which suggests Mary Elizabeth Robinson, the daughter of the well-known London actress, novelist and poet Mary Robinson. The two sonnets appeared in the Advertiser on 25 October 1794.

Thomas Browne, Poems on Several Occasions (London, 1800). Although the book was sold in London by Vernon and Hood, its title page indicates that it was printed in Manchester and sold also in Hull by Thomas Browne (presumably his estate) and in Liverpool by Merritt and Wright. The signature of “[J.M.]” at the end of the preface includes also “Liverpool, 20th April, 1800”. The remarks on contemporary poetry are entirely consistent with comments that Montgomery published elsewhere over his own name.

Browne xi.

Browne 63; Hull Advertiser 29 Aug. 1795.

Browne 66–67.

Browne 167–68, 169–70.

“Sonnet to a Sportsman” (30 Aug. 1794) and “The Death Bird” (11 Oct. 1794). This latter curiously named poem carries a brief headnote indicating that describing its subject as a bird of the West Indies. The bird is probably the West Indies barn owl (Tyto alba). In light of her two poems on British officers who died in the West Indies in 1802, this direct topical reference to West Indies subject matter hints at Hoole’s connections with friends tied to those islands.

Browne xix, xxv.

Holland and Everett 2: 68.

Hoole 167.

Hoole 7, 10.

Hoole 13, 112, 180, 70.

Hoole 63, 153, 178, 89.


Holland and Everett 2: 56. Their more lasting relationship began in 1808; see Holland and Everett 2: 238ff. The Butterfly’s Ball is mentioned in their correspondence; see Holland and Everett 2: 239–45.

Butts, “Finding and Sustaining” 106.


Holland and Everett 2: 270–72.


A Season 45.

A Week at Harrogate. A Poem: in a Series of Letters, Addressed from B**g**m*n B**d*r**d, Esq. to his Friend S*m*n. (1812). 2nd ed. Knaresborough, 1813. Asterisks replaced by letters in 1813 ed. 31–32. At the head of the “List of Books, Printed and Sold by Hargrove & Sons” included at the back of A Week appears The Harrogate Guide “By E. Hargrove. Sixth Edition”, together with predictable puffs.

Holland, Season at Harrogate 49–50.


Ramsey 42.


Ramsey 43–49.

Ramsey 206–07.

Heidi Hansson and Cathrine Norberg

LADY AUDLEY’S SECRET, GENDER AND THE REPRESENTATION OF EMOTIONS

The relationship between gender, emotion and normative ideals is a prominent theme in British sensation fiction of the 1860s, and a central concern in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s novel Lady Audley’s Secret (1862). But despite critical attention concerning the importance of emotions in the text, there are no focused studies of their meaning and narrative function. This study explores how representations of anger and shame convey gender specificity, and how the way characters express and perform emotions interplays with constructions of social power in the novel. Braddon’s work contains more examples of women than men exhibiting signs of anger and more instances of men than women showing shame, which means that anger might be understood as a female and shame as a male quality in the text. The contexts where these emotions occur indicate the opposite, however. Women displaying anger are shown to transgress gendered conduct codes, whereas men mostly experience shame because of women’s misbehaviour and as their guardians. Although the distribution of instances when male and female characters show anger or shame could initially be understood as a manifestation of the disruptive qualities of the sensation genre, such an interpretation is undermined by the gendered relations between emotional expression, power and control in the novel.

Social norms and expectations determine when a certain kind of emotional behaviour changes from acceptable to transgressive, and the status of the individual associated with the behaviour is of great importance for the verdict. In many cases, social status may be glossed as gender. Although both women and men have access to the entire emotional spectrum, their ability to act out their emotions is conditioned by their respective access to social power. The correlation between emotional expression and social position is particularly obvious in relation to anger and shame, since, in contrast to many other emotions, they are predominantly social in character. Displaying these emotions therefore functions as an instrument of control and socialization in many cultures, and the way they are expected to manifest themselves in relation to women and men plays an important role in the construction of gender. The connection between gender and emotion is, however, neither universal nor stable, but culturally determined. The sociocultural dimension of...